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SUBJECT: SHIA COALITION MEMBERS CALL FOR JAFARI TO WITHDRAW
HIS NOMINATION

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert S. Ford for
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) The first public calls from within the Shia Coalition for Jafari to withdraw his nomination for Prime Minister appeared April 1. Shia Independent Qasim Daoud took the first step when he told Reuters April 1 that "I call on Jafari to take a courageous step and set a fine example by stepping down." He explained that "there is a broad trend inside the Alliance who want Jafari to do this and we expect him to do so." On April 2, similar calls for Jafari to resign were made by SCIRI members Shaykh Jalal al-Din al-Saghir and Humam al-Hammudi. Local newspapers carried reports that Shia Independent Hassan al-Sari (Hizbullah Iraq movement) said this problem should be solved within the Shia Coalition, with guidance from the Najaf clerical establishment (marja'iya). In response to these calls, Dawa and Sadrist members (and Shia Independent Dr. Hussein al-Shahrastani) have reminded Western and Arab media that Jafari is still the Coalition's PM candidate.

12. (C) Fadhila spokesman Hassan al-Shemmeri told PolFSN April 3 that SCIRI had officially informed the other Shia Coalition blocs by letter (signed by Abdulaziz al-Hakim) April 2 that SCIRI will no longer support Jafari and will not vote for him in the Council of Representatives. Al-Shemmeri added that committees of parties loyal to Jafari (Dawa, Dawa Tanzim, and Sadrists) had been formed to convince other lists outside the Coalition to accept Jafari. He speculated that the results are already known and that these committees give Jafari and his supporters one last chance to save face. Once they return with the expected "no," a delegation will be formed to convince Jafari to resign. He speculated this might happen in the next 2-3 days.

13. (C) COMMENT. The public calls for Jafari to resign represent a turning point in the stalemate over the PM nomination. The Shia Coalition is no longer united behind its candidate, and the marja'iya have not intervened to enforce Coalition unity. The public statements from SCIRI members may make it more difficult for Jafari supporters to accept Adil Abd al-Mehdi or any other SCIRI member for the PM position. While the politicians will continue to discuss this behind closed doors (and likely in the media), it is not known how the "Shia street" will react. Al-Arabiya reported April 3 that the Sadrists will withdraw from the political process if Jafari is removed. This had the ring more of a threat than a clear statement. Thus, it is unclear whether Jafari's removal would lead to a sharp Sadrist reaction in the form of street protests, intimidation, or violence by the Jaysh al-Mehsi. More importantly, despite the public opposition from outside the Shia Coalition, and the private and now public opposition within the Shia Coalition, Jafari has shown no inclination

to willingly cede the position that he believes is
rightfully his. END COMMENT
KHALILZAD